

of the Press Secretary on January 4 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Interview With Yonit Levi of Channel 2 News

January 4, 2008

Middle East Peace Process

Ms. Levi. Mr. President, firstly, thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us.

The President. Welcome to Washington.

Ms. Levi. Thank you very much. You're just about to come to the Middle East. And in Annapolis, you said that the parties will make every effort to reach an agreement, until the end of 2008. And I—you know, I don't want to sound skeptic, but I'm an Israeli, and it's in our nature.

The President. Right. [Laughter]

Ms. Levi. Why do you believe that you can reach peace in 12 months, when it hasn't been attainable in the 7 years of your Presidency and long before that?

The President. Yes. I think we can reach a vision of what a Palestinian state would look like. But I have made it abundantly clear that the existence of a state will be subject to the obligations in the roadmap. And so the goal is to have a—something other than just verbs, words. In other words, that the state—here's what a state will look like. And what's important for that is that the Palestinians need to have something to hope for, something to be for. There needs—Abbas, who has agreed that Israel has the right to exist, must be able to say to his people: "Be for me; support me, and this is what can happen. If you follow the way of the terrorists and the killers, this will never happen."

And so I'm optimistic that we can have the outlines of a state defined. And in other words, negotiations on borders and right of return and these different issues can be settled. I'm optimistic because I believe Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas want to achieve that objective. I know I'm willing to help. But I believe we can get that done, and I think it's in Israel's interest to get it done.

One reason why it was impossible to get a two-state solution moving forward previous to this is, one, when we first came into office, there was an intifada. Secondly, a lot of people didn't necessarily agree with the two-state solution as being in Israel's interest. Ariel Sharon changed that point of view. Prime Minister Olmert campaigned on that. And so we have a good chance.

I do want to emphasize, however, that the state won't come into being just because we defined a state. It will come into being subject to the roadmap, and that's important for the Israeli people to understand.

Ms. Levi. So there won't necessarily be a complete, ratified, signed agreement by the end of 2008.

The President. There will be an agreement on what a state would look like, in my judgment. I think it'll happen. I also believe that the leaders know me, and I know them, and that there's a—you know, they say, "Well, are you going to have a timetable?" One timetable is the departure of President George W. Bush from the White House—not that that I'm any great, heroic figure, but they know me, and they're comfortable with me, and I am a known quantity. And therefore, the question is, will they decide to make the efforts necessary to get the deal done while I'm President, as opposed to maybe the next person won't agree with a two-state, or maybe the next person will take awhile to get moving?

And so there's a—I am not going to try to force the issue because of my own timetable. On the other hand, I do believe Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas want to see this done. And therefore, I'm optimistic it will get done by 2008.

Iran

Ms. Levi. So I am moving on to Iran, and I think the question on every Israeli's mind—and you're the best man to answer it—is, is Iran an immediate threat to the existence of Israel?

The President. Yes. First of all, if I were an Israeli, I would take the words of the Iranian President seriously. And as President of the United States, I take him seriously. And I've spoken very bluntly about what that

would mean, what an attack on Israel would mean if Iran were to do that.

Ms. Levi. You said world war III, if I—

The President. Well, I did. And I said that we will defend our ally, no ands, ifs, or buts. And so—now, I am—one of the concerns I'm sure amongst the Israeli population is whether this intelligence estimate that came out—what does it mean. It means to me that Iran was a threat, and Iran is a threat. In other words, just because they had a weapons—a military covert program that it suspended doesn't mean, one, they could restart it, and two, doesn't mean that their capacity to enrich couldn't—in a so-called civilian program—couldn't be transferred to a military. So I see it as a threat.

Whether there's an imminent attack coming, I don't think so. The Iranians, I'm confident, know that there would be a significant retaliation. The key, however, is to make sure that they don't end up with a weapon. And one of the things I will talk to the Prime Minister about again is our strategy to solve this issue diplomatically.

U.S. Foreign Policy

Ms. Levi. You say “diplomatically,” but is a military strike still an option until the end of your Presidency?

The President. Well, the U.S. always maintained a military option. I have told the American people that I believe we can solve this issue diplomatically. Diplomacy works best when all options are on the table. And we're making some progress. The Russians and the Chinese as well as the other members of the U.N. Security Council supported two Security Council resolutions, which some might say aren't very effective. I think they are.

I think they're effective in the sense that it creates a sense of isolation amongst the Iranians. And I constantly speak to the Iranian people when I say, you can do better than a Government which is causing you to be isolated; your economy can do better than it's doing. Because of your Government's decision not to be honest with the world, not to be transparent, not to listen to the IAEA, there will be continued economic sanctions, some of them unilaterally, some of them bi-

laterally. The sanctions on their financial institutions, for example, can be very effective.

And so the United States—we've spent a lot of time on this issue, keeping the pressure on the Iranians.

2008 Presidential Election

Ms. Levi. So we're looking to something a lot nicer, the upcoming U.S. elections. And I seem to recall you liked to be on the campaign trail. You were there twice, and you won. Are you a little bit, you know, envious of the candidates?

The President. It's an interesting question. I know exactly what they're going through. Laura and I—well, Laura and I were talking about what it was like the day before, like, the Iowa caucuses. You know, I've been through three Iowa caucuses: one, when my dad beat Ronald Reagan in 1980 and then lost; two, that when my dad came in third in Iowa in 1988 and won; and, of course, our own caucus, which then—you know, we win Iowa, go immediately to New Hampshire, lose, and eventually win.

And so there's a—it's just the beginning of a long process. And it's an important process for an American politicians because it does two things: One, it lets the electorate see how people handle stress; and equally importantly, it lets the candidate, the running—person running determine whether or not they have the inner fortitude necessary to be the President of the United States. Because if things were okay and everything is, you know, smooth, the job is kind of—it's interesting. And it's always interesting, don't get me wrong, but when times are tough is when you're really tested, when you have to make the tough decisions of war and peace. And it requires an inner fortitude that I think that you begin to develop when you're out there in those primaries.

So this is the beginning of a fairly long process, although it's been—to answer your question, I don't wish for things that are impossible to wish for. And so I'm an observer, but with a pretty intimate knowledge of the sentiments that these candidates are going through.

President's Legacy

Ms. Levi. I imagine so. You are, you know, reaching the end of your Presidency in a year, and it's sort of the season to summarize. Can you tell me what your—you consider as your biggest achievement, and what, if anything, do you regret?

The President. Yes. First of all, I'm going to get a lot done next year.

Ms. Levi. Of course.

The President. I really am. You know, there's this great myth about how the President, because there's an election or because it's the last year of his Presidency, not much is going to get done. Quite the contrary. We'll get a lot done.

I would think that—first of all, I don't believe there's such a thing as an accurate short-term history. I'm still—I read a lot of history these days. I like to read a lot about Abraham Lincoln, for example. And if they're still analyzing the 16th—the history of the 16th President, see, then I—the 43d guy just doesn't need to worry about it. I'll be long gone. But I do believe that—

Ms. Levi. Isn't that kind of sad, that you won't be appreciated enough until after you're gone?

The President. No, what really matters in life is, do you have a set of principles, and are you willing to live your life based upon those principles? That's what matters most to me. My priorities are really my faith and my family. And we're blessed with a lot of friends. And I just—I'm not the kind of person that's—I don't spend a lot of time looking in the mirror, I guess is the best way to say it. But I do believe that—I can predict that the historians will say that George W. Bush recognized the threats of the 21st century, clearly defined them, and had great faith in the capacity of liberty to transform hopelessness to hope and laid the foundation for peace by making some awfully difficult decisions.

President's Future

Ms. Levi. And finally, can I ask you, when you do leave the White House—you're still fairly young, you know—what's next for you after you're the leader of the free world?

The President. Yes, you know, I don't know. I do know where I'm going to live, and that's in Texas.

Ms. Levi. Texas.

The President. I tell my friends from Texas, I left the State with a set of principles, and I'm returning with the same set of principles. And I didn't compromise my beliefs in order to be the popular guy or the hip guy or the guy that every—you know, the cultural elite likes. But I don't know. I'm going to build a library with a freedom institute attached to it.

And it's not just freedom from tyranny; it's freedom from disease. One of the great initiatives of my administration has been the HIV/AIDS initiative on the continent of Africa. Laura and I are very much involved in an initiative to end malaria. And thanks to the taxpayers of our country, we've dedicated about \$1.6 billion to help save babies' lives. It's the tyranny of hunger, the tyranny of ignorance. I mean, there's all kinds of ways that I think I can help others realize the great blessings of life.

But I haven't gotten there yet. I've got too much to do. I mean, I've been thinking about this trip to the Middle East today, and I'm excited to go; I really am. You know, my first trip to Israel, and only trip to Israel, was in 1998. And I remember being in a hotel room and opened the curtain over the Old City, and the sun was just coming up, and it just glowed. It was golden. And I told Laura, I said, I can't believe what I'm looking at. And after she got her contacts on—[laughter]—she came and looked.

And, you know, one of the great ironies of that trip was that I was on a helicopter tour of the West Bank with Ariel Sharon. You know, life works in funny ways. I had just finished a reelection campaign in Texas, and there was a lot of pressure and a lot of talk about me running for President. But I don't think either of us would have guessed that both of us would have been serving in our respective offices at a defining moment in history. And that defining moment is the willingness of free nations to confront the ideology of hate, those who use murder to achieve political objectives. And yet there we were.

I'm saddened by the fact that he's in the state he's in. But nevertheless, it was—the beginning of a relationship started in a helicopter flying over the West Bank in 1998, and I'm glad—I'm really glad to be coming back. And I'm looking forward to being with my friend Prime Minister Olmert and other leaders.

Ms. Levi. Mr. President, thank you so much again for taking the time to talk to us. Thank you so much.

The President. You bet. Thank you.

Ms. Levi. And have a safe trip, and best of luck. We're all keeping our fingers crossed for you.

The President. We'll be fine.

Ms. Levi. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 4:05 p.m. in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority; Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel; and President Mahmud Ahmadi-nejad of Iran. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 6. Portions of this interview could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Interview With Hisham Bourar of Alhurra Television

January 4, 2008

President's Upcoming Visit to the Middle East

Mr. Bourar. Thank you, Mr. President, for taking the time to do this interview on Alhurra TV. Big trip to the Middle East—what are your objectives, and why now?

The President. Now because I believe that it's possible to advance the Annapolis agenda; now because I believe it's just going to be an—that it will be a chance to be effective on my trip. I am going to talk—advance three things: one, the vision of two states, Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace; two, to convince our friends and allies in the region that it is in their interest to support the peace process; and three is to remind people that the United States is committed to helping secure the region; that we have a active presence in the Middle East,

and that presence is not going to wane; that we're committed to helping people realize—deal with the threats and the problems of the 21st century.

President's Role in the Peace Process

Mr. Bourar. What can you do personally to press both sides, the Israelis and the Palestinians, to reach an agreement this year?

The President. Yes. Well, first of all, the agreement—they must decide they want to reach agreement. In other words—and so the first thing I can do is to make sure there's a sincere desire on the parts of President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert to achieve an agreement. I believe that desire exists. The Annapolis conference was a success because they wanted it to be a success. And it's to give them confidence and to encourage them to come up with what a state will look like, the—define that state so that people there in the region can have hope that this kind of a long-time conflict will finally come to an end. And the first step is the definition of a state.

I can press when there needs to be pressed. I can hold hands when there needs to be—hold hands. And so I'm—I will go to encourage them to stay focused on the big picture. There's going to be all kinds of distractions; and people will be trying to throw up roadblocks; and people will be trying to cause these gentlemen to—not to—to lose sight of what's possible. And my job is to help them keep a vision on what is possible.

Palestinian State

Mr. Bourar. Do you still believe that your vision of a Palestinian state can be achieved before you leave office?

The President. I think the outlines, the definition of a state can be achieved. The implementation of a state will be subject to a roadmap. In other words, there's a lot of work that has to be done. Palestinian security forces have to be reformed—which we're helping with, by the way. The entrepreneurial class of people has to be encouraged with new capital. The institutions of government need to be strengthened.

And so the state will come into being, subject to—but the first step is to—here's what